



Elmer A. Hurlburt
Died in the line of duty on February 6, 1965

Description of Act

Elmer A. Hurlburt died shortly after midnight on February 6, 1965, after fighting a two-alarm fire the night before that completely gutted an unoccupied house at 255 East Main Street belonging to Mrs. Joseph DiComandera. The fire was raging when firefighters arrived, and Hurlburt and other firefighters chopped holes in the roof on the left side of the house. A short-circuit in an electrical wire on the right side of the house prevented firefighters from approaching the blaze from that side. Arcing flashes of current shot out from the wire until a Gloucester Electric Company employee climbed a utility pole and cut off the current. The blaze was fought amid heavy smoke, snow, and freezing temperatures. Deputy Fire Chief W. Elliott O'Hearn said, "Elmer came down to complain that he didn't feel well and we put him in the rescue wagon. We had no idea what was wrong with him. He kept getting worse. We gave him oxygen and it revived him for a while and then he got worse again."

"He wanted to go home," O'Hearn continued, "but we tried to get him to let us take him to the hospital. He didn't want to go. So we took him home. When we got him there, we told his family that they should call us if they needed help." Hurlburt worsened and the police ambulance, firefighters with oxygen, and Dr. Morris H. Pett and Robert L. Jedrey all rushed to help, but this time the oxygen was to no avail. Medical Examiner John J. Egan subsequently ruled that Hurlburt's death was "caused by a coronary due to overexertion and smoke inhalation." (Firefighter Howard Cusick injured his shoulder while fighting this fire.)

Background

Elmer A. Hurlburt, recently assigned to Engine 5, was a member of the Fire Department for over 18 years. He was born in Gloucester on May 30, 1913, son of Arthur and Margaret (Coleman) Hurlburt. He was survived by his wife, Emily (Bouchie) Hurlburt of 16 Hammond Street; a son Arthur J. Hurlburt; three daughters, Joan M., wife of Ralph R. Oliver, F. Jane Hurlburt, and Robin L. Hurlburt, all of Gloucester; two grandchildren,

Denise Oliver and Ralph R. Oliver, Jr.; one brother, Joseph Hurlburt of Washington, D.C.; two sisters, Florence M., wife of Joseph B. Thomas, and Blanch R., wife of Donald M. Neimi; and several nieces and nephews.

Postscripts

Pallbearers at Hurlburt's funeral were all members of the Gloucester Fire Department in dress uniform under the direction of Captain Carlton B. McKay. Among the pallbearers were Russell M. Shea and Robert H. Zager, son of Joseph Thomas Zager. Both Shea and Joseph Zager are also memorialized on this site.

On Sunday, October 26, 1969, the **Elmer A. Hurlburt Square** at the intersection of Haskell, Hammond and Traverse Streets, and Blake Court, in East Gloucester was dedicated. This was the first square dedicated to a Gloucester firefighter who had died in the line of duty. Deputy Fire Chief Edmond B. Marble was the key speaker for the services. Marble recalled that Hurlburt was a fish worker as a young man and helped sail the schooner Gertrude L. Thebaud through the St. Lawrence River to the Chicago World's Fair in 1933.

References

Gloucester Daily Times, February 6, 1965, February 8, 1965, February 9, 1965, October 22, 1969, and October 27, 1969.